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The Interplay of Technology and Sacredness in Islam: Discussions of Muslim Scholars on Printing the Qur'an

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The Interplay of Technology and Sacredness in Islam: Discussions of Muslim Scholars on Printing the Qur'an*

Mohammed Ghaly

Abstract

In the midst of available studies on the relation between technology or science and religion, one of the vital and early episodes of this relation within the Islamic tradition did not receive the due attention from modern researchers. This episode has to do with the discussions of Muslim scholars ('Ulama) on using the then emerging technology of printing to reproduce the sacred scripture of Muslims, namely, the Qur'an. The main discussions among the 'ulama on this issue took place in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries when the Ottoman Empire was an important power in the Islamic world. The main question raised here is: what are the juristic arguments used by the 'Ulama to justify their objection to print the Qur'an? At the end, this article argues that these arguments have not been the sole agent in this issue. Social reality also played an important role and was ultimately, at least partially, responsible for a considerable shift in the standpoints of the 'Ulama towards this issue especially from the nineteenth century onwards.

KEYWORDS: Islam, Islamic law, technology and religious texts, Ottoman Empire, Fatwa

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The 1139/1727 Breakthrough

When movable type printing was first put to use in the 1455, Ottoman Empire was already an important power in the Islamic world.¹ Printing houses could already find a place in the Ottoman Empire about fifty years after the invention of Gutenberg.² However, the Sublime Porte forbade the Muslims to print texts in Arabic characters³ although it permitted the Jews and eventually other minorities to print texts in Hebrew and other languages.⁴

The main breakthrough, which took place during the reign of Sultan Aḥmad III (1637-1736)⁵, was instituting a governmental press which could print texts in Arabic characters. This breakthrough and its related incidents are central in understanding the standpoint of Muslim scholars concerning printing the Islamic texts in general and Qur'ān in particular.

The roots of the idea go back to the 1720s when the Ottoman Grand Vizier Ibrāhīm Pasha Meḥmed, known as Yirmisekiz Chelebi, was sent to France on a diplomatic mission. During his visit, Meḥmed Chelebi was convinced of the necessity of making use of this invention, namely, the art of printing.⁶ Meḥmed's son, Sa'īd Effendi (later Pasha and also an envoy to France) in cooperation with the Ottoman statesman and diplomat Ibrahim Müteferrika (d. 1754) managed to

¹ For an overall history of the Ottomans, see "Othmanlı." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol. VIII, pp. 190-226.

² There were for instance Jewish, Armenian and Greek presses, see Salīm, Nazhat. *Tārīkh al-Ṭibā'a fī Turkiya*. Riyadh: Maktabat al-Malik Fahd al-Wataniyya. 1413/1993, p. 20; Sapān, Suhayl. *Al-Ṭibā'a al-'Arabiyya fī Turkiya*. Riyadh: Dār al-Faysal al-Thaqāfiyya, 1422/2001, p. 9 & 20; "Maṭba'a." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol. VI, pp. 799 & 800.

³ A lot has been written on studying the reasons for the Muslims' delay of making use of movable type printing, see for instance "Maṭba'a.", p. 795; Bloom, Jonathan. *Paper before Print*. London: Yale University Press. 2001, p. 221; Sapān, Suhayl. *Al-Ṭibā'a al-'Arabiyya*, p. 11; Abdulrazak, Fawzi A. *The Kingdom of the Book: The History of Printing as an Agency of Change in Morocco between 1865 and 1912*. PhD dissertation, Boston University. 1990, pp. 76-77; Inalcik, Halil. *The Ottoman Empire: The Classical Age 1300-1600*. Trans. Norman Itzkowitz & Colin Imber, London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1973, p. 174; Ghobrial, John-Paul. "Diglossia and the 'Methodology' of Arabic Print", a paper presented to *The 2nd International Symposium History of Printing and Publishing in the Languages and Countries of the Middle East*, Paris: Bibliothèque nationale de France, p. 1. A software version is available on <http://perso.wanadoo.fr/colloque.imprimes.mo/pdf/JGL0.pdf> pp. 1-17.

⁴ For further discussions, see "Maṭba'a.", p. 795; Bloom, Jonathan. *Paper before Print*, p. 221; Sapān, Suhayl. *Al-Ṭibā'a al-'Arabiyya*, p. 11; Salīm, Nazhat. *Tārīkh al-Ṭibā'a*, p. 11; Abdulrazak, Fawzi A. *The Kingdom of the Book*, pp. 76 & 77; Inalcik, Halil. *The Ottoman Empire*, p. 174. For critical remarks on this claim, see Ghobrial, John-Paul. "Diglossia and the 'Methodology' of Arabic Print", pp. 2-7.

⁵ On him see, "Aḥmad III." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol. I, pp. 268-271.

⁶ Abdulrazak, Fawzi A. *The Kingdom of the Book*, p. 85; "Ibrāhīm Müteferrika." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol. III, p. 977.

achieve his father's dream by establishing the printing house, *dār al-ṭibā'a* (popularly known as *basma-khāne*) in 1139/1727.⁷ Keeping in mind the prevalence of an atmosphere which unwelcomes this invention in the Ottoman Empire, achieving such a dream was not an easy task.

After eight years of working towards this project with the patronage and financial assistance of Sa'īd Effendi, an official request for establishing the printing-house was submitted to the governmental authorities and then to the Sultan himself.⁸ In a bid to make the request convincing, Müteferrika wrote a book on the benefits of this art.⁹

According to some observers, this petition was met with opposition. Book guilds protested against the sacrilege of using the machine in producing the name of God and against the use of brushes made of pig bristles in inking the platen. Riots and civil unrest ensued and the Ottoman Caliph was forced to delay permission for this project.¹⁰

Fearing religious opposition as well, Müteferrika requested a fatwa from Shaykh al-Islām,¹¹ 'Abdullāh Effendi, on the licitness of printing.¹² Müteferrika's question was:

Zayd claims expertise in the science of printing, illuminating, and producing copies of the letters and words of dictionaries, logic, philosophy, and astronomy texts, and like works, thus being able to produce exact copies of these books, is there not permission in the Holy Law for this good work? The one who is an expert at printing seeks a legal opinion because producing an accurate edition of a work in a short time,

⁷ "Maṭba'a", p. 800. See also Reichmuth, Stefan. "Islamic Reformist Discourse in the Tulip , period (1703-30): Ibrahim Müteferrika and His Argument for Printing." *International Congress on Learning and Education in the Ottoman World 12-15 April 1999*. Ed. Çaksu, Ali. Istanbul. 2001, pp. 149-161.

⁸ Some sources stated that it was Müteferrika who submitted the formal approach, see "Maṭba'a." p. 800. Other sources proposed that it was Sa'īd Effendi who did so, see Abdulrazak, Fawzi A. *The Kingdom of the Book*, p. 86.

⁹ This was in an essay entitled *Vesiletu-t Tibaa* (On the Usefulness of printing). This essay was published in Turkish in the beginning of the first book printed by him, viz., a Turkish translation of the Arabic dictionary *Al-Ṣiḥāḥ* by al-Jawharī. For an English translation of this essay made by Christopher M. Murphy, see Atiyeh, N. George (ed.) *The Book in the Islamic World*. State University of New York & the Library of Congress. 1995, pp. 286-292.

¹⁰ Albin, Michael W. "Early Arabic printing: A Catalogue of Attitudes." *Manuscripts of the Middle East*, 1990-91, Vol. 5, p. 115.

¹¹ For more information on this title and the function of its holders, see Bulliet, Richard W. "The Shaikh al-Islām and the Evolution of Islamic Society." *Studia Islamica*. 1972, Vol. XXXV, pp. 53-67; "Shaykh al-Islām." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. IX, p. 399-402.

¹² "Maṭba'a", p. 800. See also Watson, J. William. "Ibrāhīm Müteferrika and Turkish Incunabula." *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. 1968, Vol. 88, p. 436.

with no errors and many copies, results in there being an increased number of books, which is a benefit to the community.¹³

The Shaykh al-Islām's response was:

Being able to produce this great benefit, this person receives permission with the condition that several educated persons be appointed as proof readers. Great benefit will come from the order based on that legal opinion, allowing *for the exception of the religious subjects mentioned in the tract written with the pearl pen of wisdom*.¹⁴

The "religious subjects mentioned in the tract" refers to books of religious law, Qur'anic exegesis, the traditions of the Prophet and theology.¹⁵ This fatwa was appended by encomia (*taqārīz*) from other prominent twelve religious scholars.¹⁶

Consequently Sulṭān Aḥmad III was persuaded to issue a *firmān* to Sa'īd and Ibrāhīm Müteferrika in Dhu'l Qa'da 1139/1727 authorising the opening of printing-works and enjoining the printing of books beyond the religious field. With this security behind them, Sa'īd and Müteferrika went ahead with their project. Documents dated 29 Rabī' II 1140/14 December 1727 and 2 Jumādā I 1140/16 December 1727 show that press had begun work.¹⁷

The incidents related to this breakthrough imply more than one aspect. *First*, the fatwa of the Shaykh al-Islām and the Sultan's decree have excluded, although without explanation, all books related to Qur'ān, Ḥadīth, Jurisprudence and Islamic Theology. *Second*, these strictures imposed by the fatwa of Shaykh al-Islām were not an eccentric voice but rather representative of a common attitude adopted by the 'Ulamā'. His fatwa was appended by an agreement of other twelve religious scholars.¹⁸ It is to be mentioned that before this fatwa and as early as 1555, Busbecq reported that the Turks esteemed it a sin to print religious books.¹⁹ Again after this fatwa when Sultan Selim III (1761-1808) revived printing in the 1780s, Islamic texts remained excluded from being printed.²⁰ Furthermore, it was often the case wherever printing of the Qur'ān was contemplated, controversy arose.²¹ For instance, scholars of Al-Azhar issued

¹³ Atiyeh, N. George (ed.) *The Book in the Islamic World*, p. 285.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ These fatwas were, in addition to the royal decree of the Ottoman Sultan, published at the beginning of the first book printed by Müteferrika, viz., a Turkish translation of the Arabic dictionary *Al-Şihāḥ* by al-Jawharī. See Atiyeh, N. George (ed.) *The Book in the Islamic World*, pp. 286-292.

¹⁷ "Maṭba'a", p. 800.

¹⁸ Atiyeh, N. George (ed.) *The Book in the Islamic World*, p. 285.

¹⁹ See Inalcik, Halil. *The Ottoman Empire*, p. 174.

²⁰ Abdulrazak, Fawzi A. *The Kingdom of the Book*, p. 88

²¹ "Printing of the Qur'ān." *Encyclopedia of the Qur'ān*. Leiden: Brill. 2004, p. 271.

fatwas declaring that printing religious books and Qur'ān in particular is forbidden. These fatwas remained active till a late period of the reign of Muhammad 'Alī (1760s-1849).²² Third, despite these numerous voices among Muslim scholars protesting against printing the Qur'ān and the Islamic texts in general, no detailed fatwas or discussions are traceable which would justify this protest on religious grounds.²³ Thus, it remains a riddle; why are there no detailed fatwas available on this issue? Although, to my mind, no definite answer can be given because of the absence of sufficient information on this point, there is still space for thinking of some possibilities.

It is possible that printing the Qur'ān was not a highly controversial issue which will produce pro and contra arguments or fatwas and counter-fatwas. Two main points add credit to this supposition. First, there is no trace of counter-fatwas issued to refute the fatwa of Shaykh al-Islam. What is to be noted in this regard is that the juristic contentions of Shaykh al-Islam were not accepted per se because he is Shaykh al-Islam. On the contrary, it happened often that the opinion of Shaykh al-Islam was rejected.²⁴ However, in the case of printing, available references indicate that other fatwas issued by the scholars of al-Azhar in Egypt were in line with fatwa of Shaykh al-Islam. Thus, one may conclude, the fatwa of Shaykh al-Islam was representative of the juristic standpoint adopted by the majority of the 'Ulamā²⁵. Keeping all this in mind, one would imagine that there would be no need to elaborate on this point and thus issue further fatwas. This would easily happen in the case of controversial issues such as those of the seventeenth-century innovations (*bida'*) such as singing, coffee and the pilgrimage to the tombs. These issues occupied the minds and writings of the Ottoman scholars and the pulpits of the mosques as well for a long period.²⁶

²² Riḍwān, Abū al-Futūḥ. *Tārīkh Maṭba'at Būlāq*. Cairo: Al-Maṭba'at al-Amīriyya. 1953, p. 277.

²³ I came to this conclusion after checking all available sources with relevance to this issue and after contacting a number of authors in this field and the Turkish Encyclopedia of Islam.

²⁴ Gerber, Haim. *Islamic Law and Culture: 1600-1840*, Brill: Leiden. 1999, p. 62

²⁵ 'Ulamā', Muslim scholars, religious scholars and scholars are to be used interchangeably in this article. For more information on this term 'Ulamā and the role of its holders especially in the Ottoman period, see Repp, R. C. "Some Observations on the Development of the Ottoman Learned Hierarchy." *Scholars, saints, and Sufis: Muslim Religious Institutions in the Middle East since 1500*, Ed. Keddie, Nikki R. University of California, press, 1972, pp. 17-32; Repp, R. C. "The Altered Nature of the Ulema." *Studies in Eighteenth Century Islamic History*. Ed. Naff, Thomas & Roger Owen. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University press. 1977, pp. 277-287; Zilfi, Madeline C. *The , politics of , piety: The Ulema in the , postclassical Age (1600-1800)*. Minneapolis, MN: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1988; Erashin, Seyfettin. "The Ottoman Ulema and the Reforms of Maḥmūd II." *Hamdard Islamicus*. April-June 1999. pp. 10-40; "'Ulamā'." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. 2003. CD-ROM Edition, Vol. X, pp. 801-810.

²⁶ For an overall view of such innovations and the discussions around them which were sometimes accompanied with violence, see Chelebi, Kātib. *The Balance of Truth*. London: George Allen and

In the light of these facts, the question to be raised is: how can we elaborate on this standpoint adopted by the ‘Ulamā of the eighteenth century in the light of the scanty information available?²⁷ This article investigates this question by shedding more light on two main points; one relates to the nature of the Qur’ān itself and the other to the sources used by the ‘Ulamā of this period. The first point explores one of the distinct characteristics of the Qur’anic, viz. orality-literacy, which was a stumbling block to printing this text or at least made it needless or at best no pressing need. The second point explores the juristic sources consulted by the ‘Ulamā before issuing such fatwas. Available information, despite considerably scanty and giving just cursory references to some points raised by the ‘Ulamā, represents a good starting point in this regard.

(1) Orality-Literacy of the Qur’ān²⁸

One of the main characteristics of the Qur’ān as scripture is its dual dimension, namely, a written book (*kitāb*) on one hand and an oral revelation (*Qur’ān*) on the other hand.²⁹ Neither of these two dimensions was a helping factor in accommodating the new technology of movable printing but was rather a discouraging factor in this respect.

Unwin LTD, 1957; Zilfi, Madeline C. “The Kadizadelis: Discordant Revivalism in Seventeenth Century Istanbul” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*. Oct. 1986, Vol. 45, no. 4, pp. 251-269.

²⁷ It is to be noted that the arguments mentioned below are based on the discussions of the scholars in the Mediterranean Middle East and mainly those in Turkey and Egypt. For other studies focusing on other geographical areas, see Proudfoot, Ian. “Mass Producing Houris’s Moles; or Aesthetics and Choice of Technology in Early Muslim Book Printing”, in *Islam: Essays on Scripture, Thought and Society*. Eds. Riddell, Peter G. and Tony Street Leiden: Brill, 1997, pp. 161-184; Putten, J. van der. “Printing in Riau: Two Steps toward Modernity.” *Bijdragen tot de Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*. Vol. 153, no. 4, 1997, 717-736.

²⁸ For studies analyzing this phenomenon in general, see Vansina, Jan. *Oral Tradition: A Study in Historical Methodology*. Trans. H.M. Wright. Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1973; Stock, Brian. *The Implications of Literacy: Written Language and Models of Interpretation in the Eleventh and Twelfth Centuries*. Princeton University Press, 1983; Clanchy, M. T. *From Memory to Written Record: England 1066-1307*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1993. For an anthropological perspective on the impact of literacy in particular, see Goody, J. & I. Watt. “The Consequences of Literacy.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 1962-63, Vol. 5, pp. 204-345; Goody, J. (ed.). *Literacy in Traditional Societies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968. For related discussions on this phenomenon within the Islamic context, see Schoeler, Gregor. “Writing and Publishing: On the Use and Function of Writing in the First Centuries of Islam.” *Arabica*. 1997, Vol. XLIV, pp. 423-435; Cook, Michael. “The Opponents of the Writing of Tradition in Early Islam.” *Arabica*. 1997, Vol. XLIV, pp. 437-530; Kennedy, Hugh. “From Oral Tradition to Writing Record in Arabic Genealogy.” *Arabica*. 1997, Vol. XLIV, pp. 531-544.

²⁹ See Ory, Solange. “Du Coran récité au Coran calligraphié.” *Arabica*. 2000, Vol. XLVII (3-4), pp. 366-367; Bagdadi, Nadia al-. “From Heaven to Dust: Metamorphosis of the Book in, pre-modern Arab Culture.” *The Medieval History Journal*, January-June 2005, p. 94.

As far as literacy or the written dimension is concerned, some Muslim commentators developed the idea that the pen, to which there are several references in the Qur'ān, was the first thing created by God; how else could the book be written?³⁰ The priority of the book and the pen over all things was not restricted to the realm of the sacred book alone. "The pen is the ambassador of the mind, its apostle, its further reaching tongue, and its interpreter",³¹ is a well-known statement in the Arabic literature which adds credit to this fact. It was this excellence of the pen and the mode of producing a book that was feared to be lost and most matched by printing, for the later challenged the very process of writing and thus the nature of the book.³² Explaining the standpoint of the 'Ulamā concerning printing the Qur'ān, Thomas Carter said, "The Ulema under the Sultan Ahmed III delivered a verdict that it was against the religion and honour of Islam to allow the printing of the Koran, because the Koran rested upon written tradition and must in no other way be handed down."³³

However, the oral dimension of the Qur'ān remains more central when discussing the issue of printing. According to the historian Francis Robinson, this Qur'anic phenomenon of orality, or specifically oral transmission, remains central in understanding why Muslims rejected printing for so long.³⁴ A great number of the functions of the Qur'ān as a sacred text were dependent on its oral form rather than the written one.

The centrality of the oral dimension of the Qur'ān gets clear from its very name "*al-Qur'ān*". The word *Qur'ān* is a verbal noun derived from the Arabic root *Q-R-'*, the basic sense of which is "to recite, read aloud" Accordingly, "*al-Qur'ān*" is most accurately translated as "the Reciting" or "the Recitation."³⁵ The oral form was also the first form in which the Qur'ān first appeared.³⁶ The Qur'anic revelations were originally wholly oral texts intended to be rehearsed

³⁰ Bloom, Jonathan. *Paper before Print*, p. 99; Bagdadi, Nadia al-. "From Heaven to Dust.", pp. 94 & 95.

³¹ Ibn al-Nadīm. *Al-Fihrist*, ed. Ibn 'Alī Riḍa Tajaddud, Tehran, 1981, p. 12; Bagdadi, Nadia al-. "From Heaven to Dust.", p. 95.

³² Bagdadi, Nadia al-. "From Heaven to Dust.", p. 95.

³³ Carter, Thomas Francis. *The Invention of Printing in China and its Spread Westwards*, New York: Columbia University Press. 1925, pp. 112 & 113.

³⁴ Robinson, Francis. "Technology and Religious Change: Islam and the Impact of Print." *Modern Asian Studies*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993, Vol. 27, pp. 234-236.

³⁵ Graham, William A. *Beyond the Written Word*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 1987, p. 88. On the meaning and derivation of the word "Qur'ān", see Graham, William A. "The Earliest Meaning of the Qur'ān" *Die Welt des Islams*. 1984, 23/24, p. 364

³⁶ Nasr, Sayyid Hossein. "Oral Transmission and the Book in Islamic Education: The Spoken and the Written Word." *Journal of Islamic Studies*. 1992, Vol. 3:1, pp. 1-14; "Al-Qur'ān." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, Vol. V, pp. 425.

and recited, first by Muhammad, then by the faithful; they were not sent as “a writing on parchment” (Qur’ān 6:7).³⁷

Thereafter, the Qur’ān was always transmitted orally. This was how the Prophet transmitted the messages he had from God to his followers. When, a few years after the Prophet’s death, these messages came to be written down, it was only as an aid to memory and oral transmission.³⁸ Additionally, the authoritativeness of the Qur’ān as a text of divine word is only realized in its fullness and perfection when it is correctly recited aloud.³⁹ Thus the oral tradition established itself as the standard by which the written text was to be judged. Even when the Egyptian “standard edition” was prepared in the early 1920s, it was the oral tradition rather than early Qur’ān manuscripts that served as the authority for determining the written text.⁴⁰ Consequently, in a bid to preserve the Qur’anic text, learning and memorizing the Qur’ān has been regarded as a collective duty (*farḍ kifāya*) on Muslim community (*umma*). This means that this duty must be done by a sufficient number of Muslim individuals, otherwise the whole *umma* would be sinful.⁴¹ In this vein, learning the Qur’ān by heart and then reciting it aloud has been traditionally the first task of many young Muslim boys and girls. The usual method of learning was that each day the teacher would write some verses on the pupil’s slate, and the pupil would spend the rest of the day learning them. Those who were able to recite them successfully the next day, in addition to what they already knew, would be entitled to wash their slates and have more verses written on them.⁴²

The oral form of the Qur’ān has also devotional functions in the life of Muslims. Reading or reciting it was central in the devotional practices, worship and piety in the life of Muslim individuals and societies as well. There are a vast number of Prophetic traditions that encourage Qur’anic chanting and make recitation a mark of individual piety.⁴³ Qur’ān-reading by itself is a form of supererogatory (*nafl*) worship appropriate to the higher category of believers.⁴⁴ It

³⁷ Graham, William A. *Beyond the Written Word*, p. 88.

³⁸ See Robinson, Francis. “Technology and Religious Change.”, p. 231. p. 234. See also “Al-Qur’ān.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol. V, pp. 425.

³⁹ Graham, William A. *Beyond the Written Word*, p. 80.

⁴⁰ See Ibid, pp. 96 & 97; Robinson, Francis. “Technology and Religious Change.”, p. 234; “Al-Qur’ān.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol. V, pp. 425.

⁴¹ See Qaraḍāwī, Yūsuf, al-. *Kayfa Nata’āmal ma’a al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm*. Cairo: Dār al-Shurūq, 3rd ed., 2000, p. 149. On the term *farḍ kifāya*, see “Farḍ.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol. II, p. 790.

⁴² Robinson, Francis. “Technology and Religious Change.”, p. 235. For more details on memorizing the Qur’ān as a well-known phenomenon among Muslims, see Qaraḍāwī, Yūsuf al-. *Kayfa Nata’āmal ma’a al-Qur’ān al-‘Aẓīm*, pp. 131-138.

⁴³ Graham, William A. *Beyond the Written Word*, p. 94.

⁴⁴ Quasem, M. Abul. *The Recitation and Interpretation of the Qur’ān: Al-Ghazālī’s Theory*. London: Kegan Paul International. 1982, p. 10 & footnotes 37 & 44.

also forms part of the spiritual training (*riyāḍa*) prescribed in Sufism and is regarded in certain circumstances to be the best of all forms of supererogatory worship and in others to be only inferior to the *ṣūfī*'s remembrance of God.⁴⁵

At the social level, anyone who has lived for a time in a Muslim society will have remarked also the degree to which reciting the Qur'ān occupies a prominent place in the public sphere, forming a significant part of the auditory "background" of everyday life.⁴⁶ For instance, one of the purposes of reciting the Qur'ān is to gain the blessing (*baraka*) which accrues from uttering the divine speech with due reverence and in a proper manner. This purpose is apparent in recitations performed by Muslims at the start of sermons, in marriage ceremonies, in pious gatherings and other occasions of similar type.⁴⁷ Besides this, there are also many others who cling to traditional piety and strive to preserve the lilting strains of the chanted Qur'ān as a prominent element in the "foreground" of their lives. In that most social and communal of all Muslim religious events, the month of fasting in Ramaḍān, the nights are filled with the sound of Qur'ān recitation in the mosques.⁴⁸ Anwarul Haq tells of an Indian Muslim woman, the mother of the Indian Sufi leader Muhammad Ilyās (d. 1943), who not only knew the Qur'ān by heart, but used to recite the whole Qur'ān plus ten "parts" each day in Ramaḍān, for a total of forty complete recitations, or "completions" (*khatamāt*; pl. of *khatma*, "sealing") of the holy book during the sacred month every year.⁴⁹ The *Khatma* is actually a well-known tradition among Muslims throughout the Muslim world since the time of the Prophet's Companions.⁵⁰ In the light of the aforementioned facts, it is clear that Qur'ān was accessible for those who believed in. They could make use of it in different walks of life without difficulty.

To conclude this point, printing the Qur'ān was not a pressing need for the Muslims. On the contrary preserving the sacredness and aura of the Qur'ān, in both the oral and the written forms, were seen sometimes as obstacles to make use of this new technology in order to producing this sacred text. The imperial ambassador, Busbecq, after elaborating the readiness of the Turks to make use of inventions made by others including the Christians, wrote, "They [the Turks] cannot, however, be induced as yet to use printing, or as to establish public clocks, because they think that the Scriptures, that is, their sacred books, would no

⁴⁵ Ghazālī. Abū Ḥāmid al-. *Al-Arab'īn fī Uṣūl al-Dīn*. Egypt. 1344 A.H., p. 58; Quasem, M. Abul. *The Recitation and Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, p. 11

⁴⁶ Graham, William A. *Beyond the Written Word*, p. 106.

⁴⁷ Quasem, M. Abul. *The Recitation and Interpretation of the Qur'ān*, p. 10.

⁴⁸ Graham, William A. *Beyond the Written Word*, p. 107.

⁴⁹ Haq, M. Anwarul. *The Faith Movement of Mawlānā Ilyās*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1972, p. 81; Graham, William A. *Beyond the Written Word*, p. 107.

⁵⁰ On the meaning of *khatma* and its practices in the Islamic world, see "Khatma." *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol., IV, p. 1112.

longer be *scriptures* if they were *printed*, and that, if public clocks were introduced, the authority of their muezzins and their ancient rites would thereby be impaired.”⁵¹ This gets clear when we keep in mind the juristic violations ensued from using movable type printing in producing the Qur’anic text, which are to be discussed below.

(2) Breaching Juristic Rules

As shown above, the fatwa of Shaykh al-Islam did not explain the reasons of excluding the Qur’ān and the other Islamic texts from the printing project. Only cursory statements in this context refer to the suspicion of using brushes made of pig bristles in inking the platen.⁵² The ‘Ulamā of al-Azhar in Egypt adopted the same attitude advocated by their Turkish counterparts. Three main jurisprudential justifications were forwarded by the Egyptian scholars and a fourth one can be deduced from the discussions in Turkey:

a) Printing equipments were inconsistent with the need of purity (*al-ṭahāra*) in preparing the Qur’anic text. For instance, when the Qur’ān was printed in 1833 in Būlāq press, the ‘Ulamā’ questioned the director of press whether any part of the apparatus employed the skin of dogs. In the case of Turkey, it has been rumoured that in movable type printing, type-settings were cleaned with brushes made from hog bristles and printing God’s name in this way would be the blasphemy of the blasphemies.⁵³

b) Printing the Qur’ān would entail applying heavy pressure with the means of ironware in printing the Qur’anic verses.

c) Printing the Qur’ān entails the possibility of making misprintings.⁵⁴

d) Non-Muslims would come in contact with the Qur’ān and participate in producing Qur’anic copies. That is because in 1727, when Sa’īd Effendi and Ibrahim Müteferrika were allowed to start printing, there was no well-experienced Muslim personnel in this field. Not being an expert, Müteferrika hired a Jew from one of the Hebrew printing shops in Istanbul, along with French compositors or

⁵¹ Busbecq, Ogier Ghiselin de. *The Turkish Letters of Ogier Ghiselin de Busbecq*. Tr. C. T. Forster and F. H. B. Daniell. London: Kegan Paul. 1881, Vol. I, p. 255; Lewis. Bernard. *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*. Oxford University Press. 2nd ed., 1968, p. 41.

⁵² Carter, Thomas Francis. *The Invention of Printing*, p. 112; Albin, Michael W. “Early Arabic Printing”, p. 115.

⁵³ Ibid, p. 112; Kaldy-Nagy, Gy. “Beginnings of the Arabic-letter Printing in the Muslim World.” Ed. Kaldy-Nagy, Gy. *The Muslim East: Studies in Honour of Julius Germanus*. Budapest, 1974, p. 203.

⁵⁴ Riḍwān, Abū al-Futūḥ. *Tārīkh Maḥba‘at Būlāq*, pp. 277-279; Shīkhū, Luwīs. *Tārīkh Fann al-Ṭibā‘a fī al-Mashriq*. Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq. 1995, p. 17.

typesetters who were brought from Europe to run the printing house.⁵⁵ Before delving into further details elaborating the abovementioned arguments, three main notes are in order.

The first note is on the juristic sources. The main sources to tell us more about the arguments advanced by the ‘Ulamā are the early standard *fiqh* manuals which were authoritative for the ‘Ulamā of this period. Haim Gerber said in this respect, “There is no question that most legal decisions were based on the authorities of the Ḥanafī tradition. Jurists were following the footsteps of former ones in a sort of *taqlīd*.”⁵⁶ Thus the main sources to be consulted below are the standard Ḥanafī *fiqh* manuals such as *al-Hidāya* by al-Marghinānī (d. 1197), *Kanz al-Daqa’iq* by Ḥāfiẓ al-Dīn al-Nasafī (d. 1310), *Mutlaqā al-Abḥur* by Ibrāhīm al-Ḥalabī (d. 1549), etc. Such books, alongside their commentaries, super-commentaries and abridgments, were essential part of the curricula of the Ottoman *madrasas* (religious schools).⁵⁷ The whole class of ‘Ulamā’, ranging from *imāms* to Shaykh al-Islam, was trained in these *madrasas*, which were the key institutions of learning and education in the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁸

The second note is on the centrality of the Ḥanafī School which enjoyed an official status during the reign of the Ottoman Empire.⁵⁹ Thus, early Ḥanafī manuals will receive more attention in the discussions to follow. The sources of other schools will not be completely ignored keeping in mind that in the Ottoman provinces inhabited by large numbers of non-Hanafites, the text-books of other *madhhabs* were also used.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ See Abdulrazak, Fawzi A. *The Kingdom of the Book*, p. 87, quoting from Partington, David, “Arabic Printing” *Encyclopaedia of Library and Information Science*, Vol. 24, p. 60.

⁵⁶ According to Gerber, “The translation of *Taqlīd* as imitation is not only pejorative, but factually wrong. *Taqlīd* is used mainly in the context of accepting someone’s intellectual authority.” See Gerber, Haim. *Islamic Law and Culture*, p. 71 (footnote 1) & 72.

⁵⁷ For these books as part of the curricula of the *madrasas*, see Has, Selim Şükrü. “The Use of *Mutlaqā’l-Abḥur* in the Ottoman Madrasas and in Legal Scholarship.” *The Journal of Ottoman Studies*. Istanbul, 1998, Vol. VII-VIII pp. 394 & 395; Bilge, M. *İlk Osmanlı Medreseleri*, Istanbul, 1984, pp. 48, 49 & 63. On *madrasa* as an institution in the Ottoman Empire, see Unan, Fhari. “Medrese Education in the Ottoman Empire.” *The Great Ottoman-Turkish Civilisation*. 2000, Vol. 4, pp. 631-642.

⁵⁸ Ekmeleddin, Ihasnoglu. “Changes in Ottoman Educational Life and Efforts towards Modernization in the 18th and 19th Centuries.” p. 119.

⁵⁹ See Inalcik, Halil. *The Ottoman Empire*, p. 181; “Ḥanafīyya.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol., III, pp. 162-164. The Ottoman Empire was sometimes even accused of being intolerant to the other *madhhabs*. See Jackson, Sherman. *Islamic Law and State*. Brill: Leiden, 1996, pp. XVIII ff. Cf. Gerber, Haim. *Islamic Law and Culture*, pp. 68ff.

⁶⁰ Has, Selim Şükrü. “The Use of *Mutlaqā’l-Abḥur*,” p. 394.

The third note has to do with the copyists (*nāsikh*, pl. *nussākh* or *warrāq*, pl. *warrāqūn*)⁶¹ whose number in the 18th century Istanbul was ranging between 20.000 and 90.000.⁶² They expressed vehemently their protest against the printing project.⁶³ Although the interests of the protestors are mainly economic, the religious dimension is closely interrelated. First of all, it is a common practice to find ‘Ulamā specialised in theology, Qur’anic Exegesis (*Tafsīr*) or Prophetic Traditions (*Ḥadīth*) among the copyists.⁶⁴ Additionally, juristic regulations especially those in the Ḥanafī fiqh manuals, as to be noticed below, gave space for copying to be a profitable profession. That’s why juristic regulations with relevance to copying or copyists will be also given attention in the discussions to follow.

A) The Issue of Purity (*Ṭahāra*)

One of the important *ādāb* that *must be* and not only *should be* considered while writing the Qur’ān is using pure (*ṭāhir*) materials.⁶⁵ An intentional use of impure material for writing the Qur’ān would, according to some scholars, put the perpetrator outside the borders of Islam.⁶⁶ Muslim jurists are in agreement that it is forbidden to use impure ink or paper or any other impure middle for writing the Qur’ān.⁶⁷ As stated above, there was a suspicion of using brushes made of pig bristles in inking the platen.⁶⁸ Impure things (*najasāt*) as categorised by Muslim scholars do not belong to just one rank. The pig in particular belongs to the highest form of impurities because it cannot be manipulated in a certain way to

⁶¹ According to some sources, the term “Warrāq”, was specifically applied to the copyists of Qur’ān and Ḥadīth compilations, see “Warrāq.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol. XI, pp. 150 & 151

⁶² Sapān, Suhayl. *Al-Ṭibā‘ā al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 12; “Maṭba‘a.”, p. 795; Kreiser, Klaus. *The Beginnings of Printing in the Near and Middle East: Jews, Christians and Muslims*, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2001, p. 5.

⁶³ Knowing about the project, they organized a massed demonstration against the event. They carried on their shoulders an empty coffin with manuscript and writing tools therein and marched towards the graveyard expressing their fear that the implementation of printing would result in the extermination of their profession. Knowing that the permission excluded the religious books, they did not end up their march and went home. See Abdulrazak, Fawzi A. *The Kingdom of the Book*, p. 87, footnote 29; Sapān, Suhayl. *Al-Ṭibā‘ā al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 13.

⁶⁴ “Warrāq.”, pp. 150 & 151. This was also the case when printing was introduced to Morocco, see Abdulrazak, Fawzi A. *The Kingdom of the Book*, pp. 152-155.

⁶⁵ Wizārat al-Awqāf wa al-Shu‘ūn al-Islāmiyya bi al-Kuwayt. *Al-Mawsū‘a al-Fiqhiyya*, Kuwait: Wizārat al-Awqāf al-Kuwaytiyya. n. d., Vol. 38, p.10.

⁶⁶ Ibid, Vol. 7, p. 99

⁶⁷ Ibid, Vol. 38, p. 14.

⁶⁸ Carter, Thomas Francis. *The Invention of Printing*, p. 112; Albin, Michael W. “Early Arabic Printing.”, p. 115.

get purified.⁶⁹ However, Muslim jurists differed on whether this impurity is restricted to the flesh of the pig or exhausting all its parts. The Mālikīs opted for the first opinion. However, the Ḥanafīs along with the other two Sunni schools of law opined that the impurity of the pig is not only for its flesh but goes also for all its parts including bones, skin, hair and even its sweat, saliva and sperm.⁷⁰

B) Applying Heavy Pressure with the Means of Ironware in Printing the Qur'ān

Handling the Qur'ān in a way indicative of disrespect for its sacredness is extremely condemned in the Islamic sources to the extent that it can place the perpetrator outside the boundaries of Islam.⁷¹ It seems that the 'Ulamā' understood that applying heavy pressure with the means of ironware in printing the Qur'ān might fall under such condemned conduct even if it will not be necessarily classified as an act of disbelief. It is noteworthy to elaborate a bit on the great attention lavished by Muslims upon the physical text of the Qur'ān in order to understand to what extent it was treated with great care. Among all books, the Qur'ān, as a physical object, enjoyed always a special care and treatment. The aura of the Qur'ān was distanced from any other book by the writing material used and, because of the nature of this material, the way in which the paper sheets were kept together as a book. The material form functioned as another marker of the difference between sacred and profane books, since the Qur'ānic collection of verses written on sheets (*ṣuḥuf*) of parchment (*riqq*) which were folded into four pages, placed into one another and assembled in a box of wooden covers (*lawḥayn* or *daffatayn*).⁷² Because of this special aura accorded to the Qur'ān, special regulations were formulated on how to keep this sacred text unharmed, requiring special care for its location among other books, always on the top of all books, in an unpolluted (*tāhir naẓīf*) place moving it only in a special container to protect the book itself from unwarranted touch.⁷³

⁶⁹ Shaykhī Zādah. *Majma' al-Anhur fī Sharḥ Multaqā al-Abḥur*, Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī. n. d., Vol. 1, p. 32.

⁷⁰ *Al-Mawsū'a al-Fiqhiyya*. Vol. 20, p. 33.

⁷¹ Ibn 'Ābidīn. *Radd al-Muḥtār 'alā al-Durr al-Mukhtār*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya. 1992, Vol. 3, p. 719.

⁷² Bagdadi. Nadia al-. "From Heaven to Dust.", p. 95.

⁷³ *Ibid*, p. 98.

C) The Possibility of Making Misprintings

Muslim jurists outlined a number of regulations that are to be followed by those who want to take up the task of writing the Qur'ān. These regulations are known as *ādāb kitābat al-muṣḥaf* (practical manners of writing the Qur'ān).⁷⁴

For instance, the Qur'ān is to be written in a specific way mostly different from the standard Arabic writing rules. This specific way is traced back to the copy of the Qur'ān authorised during the reign of the third Caliph 'Uthmān. Muslim jurists with the exception of very few among them opined that any new copy of the Qur'ān should follow the same pattern of the 'Uthmān's *muṣḥaf*.⁷⁵

That is why the scribes of the Qur'ān should have first mastered this art. Consequently, one who wants to have a standard copy of the Qur'ān in his/her house should look for those professionals who master these *ādāb*. The Ottoman Ḥanafī jurist, Shaykhī Zādah, said in this regard, "Qur'ān is to be written in the best and the clearest handwriting using the best paper, the most grandiose pen and the most glittering ink",⁷⁶

C.A. The Copyists:

The Ḥanafīs gave also more space for showing the professional techniques of the copyists while writing the Qur'ān. For instance the Ḥanafī jurists, different to other opinions expressing their aversion for this practice, found no harm in recording the chapters (*suwar*) and parts (*ajzā'*) in the Qur'anic copies especially for the non-Arabic speaking people to make the Qur'ān more accessible to them.⁷⁷ Ottoman copyists and calligraphers strove to attain perfection in the production of the Qur'ān manuscripts. In this vein, profitable jobs based on producing Qur'anic copies were not limited to the scribes only but further included those engaged in ornamenting and beautifying the manuscripts of the Qur'ān. Interestingly enough these jobs have their jurisprudential (*fiqhī*) dimensions.

Concerning these "ultra-jobs", juristic opinions are not in agreement. There are two main tendencies. The first tendency narrows the way for these ultra-jobs. For instance, a number of the Companions of the Prophet (*Saḥāba*)

⁷⁴ *Al-Mawsū'a al-Fiqhiyya*. Vol. 38, pp. 13-17.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, Vol. 38, pp. 12 & 13

⁷⁶ Shaykhī Zādah. *Majma' al-Anhur*, Vol. 2, p. 554. For a later Ottoman treatise dedicated for this topic, see Witkam, Jan Just. "Twenty-nine Rules for Qur'ān copying: A Set of Rules for the Lay-out of a Nineteenth century Ottoman Qur'ān Manuscript." *Journal of Turkish Studies*, 2002, Vol. 26/1, pp. 339-348.

⁷⁷ *Al-Mawsū'a al-Fiqhiyya*. Vol. 12, p. 291; Zayla'ī, al-. *Tabyīn al-Ḥaqā'iq Sharḥ Kanz al-Daqā'iq*, 2nd ed., Beirut: Dār al-Kitāb al-Islāmī. n. d., Vol. 6, p. 30; Bābertī, al-. *Al-'Ināya Sharḥ al-Hidāya*, Beirut: Dār al-Fikr. n. d., Vol. 10, p. 62.

such as Ibn ‘Abbās, Abū Dharr and Abū al-Dardā’ declared their aversion for ornamenting Qur’ān with gold. This is the opinion adopted by the Mālikī and the Ḥanbalī Schools arguing that these ornaments might divert the concentration of those who are reciting the Qur’ān. One of the opinions expressed in the Shāfi‘ī School categorises this act even as forbidden (*ḥarām*).⁷⁸

The second tendency, where the Ḥanafīs are represented, adopts a more lenient standpoint concerning beautifying the text of the Qur’ān and making it more friendly to recite and memorize. For instance, the Ḥanafīs found no harm in beautifying the Qur’ān and ornamenting it with gold.⁷⁹ Such statements would, at one hand, open the door for more professions to get engaged in the industries of producing the Qur’ān. On the other hand, these statements give the chance for those professionals to produce grandiose Qur’anic copies of relatively high prices.

Professionals producing the copies of the Qur’ān still need to sell them so that they can earn money. Juristic statements vary in this respect between considering this action as forbidden (*ḥarām*), detestable (*makrūh*) or permissible (*mubāḥ*). The first ruling (*ḥarām*) is attributed to the Ḥanbalī School considering selling the Qur’ān contradictory to glorifying it which is already obligatory. They quote in this regard a statement attributed to the Companion ‘Abdullāh b. ‘Umar, “I wish hands selling it [the Qur’ān] would be amputated”. The second ruling (*makrūh*) is attributed to the Shāfi‘ī School which stated that selling the Qur’ān is tantamount to underestimating its great value. The third (*mubāḥ*) ruling is the one chosen by the Ḥanafī School because selling is only for the paper and the cover and selling such material is permissible.⁸⁰ Strikingly enough, renting a copy of the Qur’ān to read is not allowed according to the Ḥanafī jurists and if the two parties concluded a contract, then it is an invalid transaction. The rationale of this ruling is that a valid leasing contract should involve a benefit against price. However, in the case under discussion the benefit is not in the copy itself but in the action of the lessee, i.e., the ability to read, and this is not in the hand of the lesser. Thus, the lesser does not deserve money because there is no real benefit provided by him.⁸¹ On the other hand, it is legally possible to hire a professional against a specific pay for the sake of writing a copy of the Qur’ān.⁸² There is no doubt that hiring a person rather than a copy of the Qur’ān would give more space for those professionals to earn more money.

⁷⁸ *Al-Mawsū‘a al-Fiqhiyya*. Vol. 21, p. 286 & Vol. 38, p. 14.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, Vol. 12, p. 291; Zayla‘ī, al-. *Tabyīn al-Ḥaqā’iq*, Vol. 6, p. 30; Bābertī, al-. *Al-‘Ināya Sharḥ al-Hidāya*, Vol. 10, p. 62.

⁸⁰ *Al-Mawsū‘a al-Fiqhiyya*. Vol. 9, pp. 232 & 33.

⁸¹ Sarakhsī, al-. *Al-Mabsūṭ*. Beirut: Dār al-Ma‘rifā. 1989, Vol. 16, p. 36; Kasānī al-. *Badā’i‘ al-Ṣanā‘i‘ fī Tartīb al-Sharā’i‘*, Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-‘Ilmiyya. 1986, Vol. 4, p. 175.

⁸² *Ibid*, Vol. 16, p. 42.

Being fully aware of this professional tradition of writing the Qur'ān and almost completely unaware of this "new" technology of printing, would make the Muslim scholars highly doubtful about how these machines will keep in mind all the aforementioned regulations.

D) The Non-Muslims' Involvement

Missing experts in the new field of printing, Müteferrika, hired a Jew from one of the Hebrew printing shops in Istanbul, along with French compositors or typesetters who were brought from Europe to run the printing house.⁸³ Furthermore, between 1728 when the first book was printed under the supervision of Müteferrika, and 1745 when Müteferrika died, not even one Muslim printer seems to have been trained to insure the continuity of the printing operation. Therefore the press came to a sudden halt after the death of the manager.⁸⁴

Thus, printing the Qur'ān in this case means that non-Muslim workers will inevitably come in contact with the Qur'ān. This situation raises two main jurisprudential issues, namely, a) the Qur'ān can/cannot be touched by a non-Muslim and b) making copies of the Qur'ān with the help of a non-Muslim copyist.

As far as the first point is concerned, a Qur'anic verse and a Prophetic tradition have been frequently quoted by Muslim scholars to argue that a copy of the Qur'ān is not to be touched except by someone who is purified (*ṭāhir*). The Islamic schools of law are not in agreement on the exact interpretation of the term *ṭāhir*. Contrary to other schools which adopted a bit more lenient standpoint, the Ḥanafī School argued that this term excludes every person except those who are ritually purified, i.e., performed the ritual ablution (*wuḍū'*). This ruling holds true also concerning touching coins in which the Qur'ān is inscribed and books of Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsīr*) as well.⁸⁵ The prohibition is not limited to touching but goes further to include reading and writing the Qur'ān especially if that person is of major ritual impurity (*janāba*).⁸⁶

There is also an agreement among the four schools of law including the Ḥanafī school that a non-Muslim should not touch the Qur'ān.⁸⁷ A single opinion

⁸³ See Abdulrazak, Fawzi A. *The Kingdom of the Book*, p. 87, quoting from Partington, David, "Arabic Printing," in *Encyclopaedia of Library and Information Science*, Vol. 24, p. 60.

⁸⁴ Abdulrazak, Fawzi A. *The Kingdom of the Book*, p. 87.

⁸⁵ See Kasānī, Abū Bakr al-. *Badā'i' al-ṣanā'i'*, Vol. 1, pp. 33 & 34. For instance, the Shāfi'ī School is of the opinion that a person without ritual ablution (*wuḍū'*) can still touch the Qur'ān, Ibid.

⁸⁶ Zayla'ī, al-. *Tabyīn al-ḥaqā'iq*, Vol. 1, pp. 57 & 58

⁸⁷ Juday', 'Abdullāh al-. *Al-Muqaddimāt al-Asāsiyya fī 'Ulūm al-Qur'ān*, 1st ed., Mu'assasat al-Rayyān. 2001, p. 556. See also *Al-Mawsū'a al-Fiqhiyya*. Vol. 7, pp. 133.

attributed to Muḥammad b. al-Ḥasan within the Ḥanafī school allowed the *dhimmī* (a protected non-Muslim subject) to touch the Qur'ān provided that he/she would do *ghusl* (a ritual washing of the whole body) beforehand.⁸⁸

As for hiring non-Muslims to make copies of the Qur'ān, the majority of the jurists did not permit this.⁸⁹ However, sayings recorded in the Ḥanafī and Ḥanbalī schools do not prohibit such acts. They stated that it is possible to hire a non-Muslim for copying the Qur'ān and some of them stipulated that such a person will not come in contact with the Qur'ān by touching or carrying it.⁹⁰

Concluding Remarks

To conclude, the interplay between the legal theory evolved by the 'Ulamā and the social practice created by the communities is to be elaborated at the hand of the discussions on printing the Qur'ān and the other religious texts.

Introducing the movable-type printing and the associated incidents in the 18th and 19th centuries is indicative of the reciprocal influences between the 'Ulamā representing the legal theory on one hand and the reality of Muslim communities demonstrating the social practice on the other hand.

As for the social practice, making use of printing especially for producing religious texts did not represent a public need in the Muslim communities. On the contrary, the manuscript culture was cultivated in the Muslim world. Muslims were inclined to buy and obtain books in the manuscript form rather than the printed one.⁹¹ For instance, Arabic books were already printed outside the Muslim lands, e.g. Rome, to be sold in the Orient. However, there was no demand on such books among Muslims. As a result, these printing Arabic books were used almost exclusively for missionary activities.⁹² Additionally, introducing the movable type printing in the eighteenth century would have caused financial harms for a huge

⁸⁸ *Al-Mawsū'a al-Fiqhiyya*. Vol. 7, pp. 133.

⁸⁹ For a general overview of the juristic opinions on this issue, see Ṭurayqī, 'Abdullāh al-. *Al-Isti'āna bi Ghayr al-Muslimīn fī al-Fiqh al-Islāmī*. Beirut: Mu'assasat al-Risāla. 2nd ed., 1414 A.H., pp. 204 & 205.

⁹⁰ For the Ḥanbalī standpoint, see Maqdisī, Muḥammad b. Muflīḥ al-. *Al-Ādāb al-Shar'iyya*. Beirut: 'Ālam al-Kutub. n. d., Vol. 2, p. 288; Bahūtī, Maṣṣūr b. Yūnus al-. *Kashshāf al-Qinā' 'an Matn al-Iqnā'*. Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1982, Vol. 1, p. 136; *Al-Mawsū'a al-Fiqhiyya*. Vol. 38, pp. 19 & 20. For the Ḥanafī opinion, see Sarakhsī. al-. *Al-Mabsūṭ*. Beirut: Dār al-Ma'rifa. 1989, Vol. 16, p. 42. Whether this classical opinion on copying the Qur'ān is also applicable to printing its text, it remains a questionable case. According to 'Abdullāh al-Ṭurayqī, printing the Qur'ān is a different case and thus a non-Muslim can be involved in this task provided that a Muslim committee would be responsible for supervision and revision in order to avoid alterations or mistakes. See Ṭurayqī, 'Abdullāh al-. *Al-Isti'āna bi Ghayr al-Muslimīn*, p. 205.

⁹¹ Salīm, Nazhat. *Tārīkh al-Ṭibā'a*, pp. 26 & 27.

⁹² *Ibid*, pp. 12 & 13.

number of copyists.⁹³ Among all books, the religious ones especially those to be taught in the institutions of religious educations (*madrāsas*) were by default highly saleable and marketable.⁹⁴ This might explain the massed demonstration organised by the copyists which were appeased when the demonstrators knew that the permission granted by Shaykh al-Islam excluded the religious books.⁹⁵

In the midst of this social reality, Shaykh al-Islam ‘Abdullāh Effendi, issued his fatwa which permitted setting up the first governmental printing-house for Arabic characters and concurrently excluded the religious texts. It seems the fatwa satisfied all parties involved in this issue including Sultan Aḥmad III and the copyists as well. In Egypt, the scholars of al-Azhar adopted a standpoint similar to that of Shaykh al-Islam and Muḥammad ‘Alī, although eager to print the Qur’ān, did not want to clash with the ‘Ulamā and thus postponed this project. In 1832, Muḥammad ‘Alī decided to produce the first printed edition of Qur’ān. As a sign of the influence of the ‘Ulamā in Egypt at this time, the edition still had to bear the seal of Shaykh al-Tamīmī, Mufti of Egypt. Muḥammad ‘Alī asked him to put his seal on the printed copy so that selling and circulating it would be legitimate (*mashrū‘*). Contrary to the case of Shaykh al-Islam, what the Mufti of Egypt did was not representative of the majority among scholars of al-Azhar who still had their observations against printing the Qur’ān.⁹⁶ On the basis of errors found in the printed edition, the ‘Ulamā of al-Azhar could convince the succeeding ruler of Egypt, ‘Abbās I (1813-1854)⁹⁷ to issue an order in May 1853 to confiscate the printed editions, forbid selling or circulating them and punish those who do not abide by this order.⁹⁸ Being well-trained in the traditional Islamic Jurisprudence (*fiqh*), the ‘Ulamā did not face difficulties to consult the standard *fiqh* manuals in order to strengthen their standpoint with different juristic arguments.

It should be also kept in mind that the juristic violations caused by printing the Qur’ān, as outlined by the ‘Ulamā, were not chronic. Impure material can be replaced with pure one; misprintings can be corrected and so forth. The ‘Ulamā were not inclined to exert efforts in order to repair the slip-ups of the new system to make it, religiously speaking, fitting for printing the Qur’anic text. This was, to my mind, because of the social reality which did not have a pressing need for printing the Qur’ān but also was not yet ready to accommodate this new technology in general. Jonathan Bloom summed up this reality by saying,

⁹³ Sapān, Suhayl. *Al-Ṭibā‘ā al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 12; “Maṭba‘a,” p. 795.

⁹⁴ Ibid, p. 13; Watson, J. William. “Ibrāhīm Müteferrika,” p. 436

⁹⁵ See Abdulrazak, Fawzi A. *The Kingdom of the Book*, p. 87, footnote 29; Sapān, Suhayl. *Al-Ṭibā‘ā al-‘Arabiyya*, p. 13.

⁹⁶ Ridwān, Abū al-Futūḥ. *Tārīkh Maṭba‘at Būlāq*, pp. 278 & 279.

⁹⁷ On him, see “‘Abbās Ḥilmī I.” *Encyclopaedia of Islam*. Vol. I, p. 13

⁹⁸ Ridwān, Abū al-Futūḥ. *Tārīkh Maṭba‘at Būlāq*, p. 279.

“Although Muslims did not use the printing press until the eighteenth century, and then only tentatively, they had other means of transmitting knowledge effectively and broadly, and for the preceding eight centuries the inhabitants of the Islamic lands –not only Muslims but also Christians and Jews as well- controlled the sluice gates of the very stream of knowledge at which thirsty Europeans repeatedly came to drink.”⁹⁹ In short adopting the technology of printing had to wait till people could see the benefits of this technology.¹⁰⁰

When this social context changed, the legal theory presented by the ‘Ulamā changed as well. By time, Muslims came to adopt printing when they felt Islam itself was at stake and print was a necessary weapon to defend their faith.¹⁰¹ The reality of the printing industry also underwent considerable changes. First of all it is not any more the industry of the non-Muslims because Muslim printers were trained to cast the needed type.¹⁰² Furthermore besides movable type printing, lithography¹⁰³ was introduced in the late eighteenth century and became available to Muslims in the nineteenth century.¹⁰⁴ Different reasons made lithography more appealing to Muslims than movable type printing. First, it is an art which lends itself remarkably well to the production of writing. As a corollary, there is the cultural reason; lithography causes no problem to the reader who is accustomed to the manuscript style.¹⁰⁵ Second, it is economically in favour of the large section of the urban working class, namely, the copyists, which would have been financially harmed by movable type printing.¹⁰⁶ Third, it is also in favour of the masses in the economic sense. Lithography is a much cheaper process, requiring importation of less complex machinery and materials.¹⁰⁷ This was reflected in lowering the prices of books and facilitating owning them for a larger number of people. After all, one of the main objectives of printing was to make the scripture affordable, an Everyman’s Qur’ān.¹⁰⁸

⁹⁹ Bloom, Jonathan. *Paper before Print*, p. 91.

¹⁰⁰ Robinson, Francis. “Technology and Religious Change.”, p. 239.

¹⁰¹ Ibid.

¹⁰² See Abdulrazak, Fawzi A. *The Kingdom of the Book*, pp. 88.

¹⁰³ Lithographic printing is based on the repulsion of oil to water applied to a plane surface, such as a flat stone or metal plate. Ink adheres to the image and is repelled from the blank areas. See “Printing of the Qur’ān.”, p. 269.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, Vol. 4 p. 269. On introducing lithography in Istanbul, see “Maṭba‘a.”, p. 802.

¹⁰⁵ “Maṭba‘a.”, p. 795.

¹⁰⁶ “Printing of the Qur’ān.”, p. 269; “Maṭba‘a.”, p. 795.

¹⁰⁷ “Printing of the Qur’ān.”, p. 269.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid, p. 269. Muḥammad Ḥaqqī (d. 1883) complained of the high prices of manuscripts if compared with the low prices of the printed editions. For instance, a book like *Rūḥ al-Bayān* (a Qur’anic commentary by Ismā‘īl Ḥaqqī) would cost fifteen thousand Qurush to buy it in a manuscript form whereas its printed edition would cost four hundred or less. See Ḥaqqī, Muḥammad. *Mafza’ al-Khalā’iq wa Manba’ al-Ḥaqā’iq*, cited in Wazzānī. Maḥdī al-. *Al-Mi‘yār al-Jadīd*. Morocco. Vol. 11, p. 337; Abdulrazak, Fawzi A. *The Kingdom of the Book*, p. 91.

In this vein, the ‘Ulamā began gradually to realise the enormous implications of printing to both educational and scholarly world in which they prospered.¹⁰⁹ In the light of the new social reality and the advantages attached to printing, the above-mentioned juristic violations would be easily neutralised. For instance, the necessity of non-Muslims’ involvement in printing the Qur’ān is not existent any more because of the availability of new well-trained Muslim printers. The possibility of making misprintings while printing was avoided by choosing a competent group of ‘Ulamā responsible for revising and correcting the text to be printed.¹¹⁰ Applying heavy pressure with the means of ironware in printing the Qur’anic verses was overlooked because printing was seen to entail more benefits than harms. In this regard they recalled the juristic rule, “Actions should be judged on the basis of their ultimate ends”. Although applying heavy pressure with the means of ironware runs, in principle, contrary to glorifying the Qur’ān, it is to be overlooked because of its greater benefits. By analogy, the same practice is also used when binding the Qur’ān but it is also overlooked for the same reason.¹¹¹ Finally the problem of using impure materials for printing the Qur’ān can be easily solved by using pure ones. Actually, the standpoint of the ‘Ulamā went further than just permitting the religious texts or the Qur’ān to be printed. They eventually commended this technology naming it a blessed (*mubārak*) practice.¹¹² The ‘Ulamā participated also in projects of printing Islamic books and Qur’ān as well.¹¹³

In the light of the aforementioned occurrences, it is felicitous to check the argument that condemns the ‘Ulamā because of their objection to printing the Qur’ān and regarded it as a sign of conservatism.¹¹⁴ Muslim scholars of the post-classical period, including and may be especially those of the Ottoman period, were generally accused of rigidity and doing no more than emulating or copying the contentions hold by the founders of the juristic schools (*madhāhib*).¹¹⁵ Gerber criticised this general accusation by saying, “No legal system can function

¹⁰⁹ Ibid, pp. 89. The exact date of allowing Islamic texts to be printed in the Ottoman Empire is not clear. However, 1818 seems to be a turning point in the history of printing in the Muslim world as increasing number of Islamic texts were being published from this date onwards. See Ibid, p. 89, footnote 34.

¹¹⁰ “Printing of the Qur’ān.”, p. 271.

¹¹¹ Shīkhū, Luwīs. *Tārīkh Fann al-Ṭibā’a fī al-Mashriq*, p. 22, footnote 5.

¹¹² See Ḥaqqī. Muḥammad. *Mafza’ al-Khalā’iq wa Manba’ al-Ḥaqā’iq*, cited in Wazzānī. Maḥdī al-. *Al-Mi’yār al-Jadīd*, Vol. 11, p. 337; Abdulrazak, Fawzi A. *The Kingdom of the Book*, p. 91.

¹¹³ For instance, the 1920s project of the Cairo edition of the Qur’ān was run by a number of Al-Azhar scholars. See “Printing of the Qur’ān.”, p. 272.

¹¹⁴ See for instance, Paton, A. *A History of the Egyptian Revolution*. London, 1870, Vol. 2, p. 245; Riḍwān, Abū al-Futūḥ. *Tārīkh Maṭba’at Būlāq*, pp. 277-279; AbiFares. Huda Smithshuijzen. *Arabic Typography: A Comprehensive Sourcebook*. London: Saqi Books, 2001, p. 43.

¹¹⁵ See Inalcik, Halil. *The Ottoman Empire*, p. 173; Gerber, Haim. *Islamic Law and Culture*, p. 71.

without a large dose of conservatism, for if decisions are not based on previously existing rules, the result will be arbitrariness, if not chaos. But conservatism may turn into rigidity if it is not allowed with a measure of flexibility. Although the eponymous founders of the schools of law were greatly revered, muftis and qadis nevertheless enjoyed a wide measure of discretion due to several features of the system that considerably relaxed its potential rigidity.”¹¹⁶

Discussions of the ‘Ulamā on printing the Qur’ān adds credit to Gerber’s statement. Away from conservatism or pragmatism, which can be the reason of adopting one attitude or another by some of the ‘Ulamā, this shift in the attitudes of the ‘Ulamā towards printing the Qur’ān is indicative of the interaction between the legal theory as evolved by the ‘Ulamā and the social practice as crystallised in day-to-day living in the Muslim community.

On the other hand, names like Sa‘īd Effendi and Ibrahim Müteferrika who did not belong to the class of the traditional ‘Ulamā but still played a significant role in introducing the technology of printing should be also kept in view. Such names are indicative of a new class of knowledge producers who still can work and influence Muslim communities sometimes together with and other times competitive to the ‘Ulamā.¹¹⁷

Finally, the discussions of the Muslim scholars on the technology of printing and their standpoints which shifted in accordance with different social circumstances should not be approached as an isolated historical incidence. These discussions can clarify also of the complications around the standpoints of contemporary Muslim scholars towards different technological advancements.

The standpoints of these scholars towards different bioethical questions on cloning, stem-cell research, In vitro fertilisation (IVF), etc. serve as good examples in this regard. In short, these scholars are not working with scriptural references in the Qur’ān and the Sunna only but to other socio-political and sometimes scientific dimensions as well.

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¹¹⁶ Gerber, Haim. *Islamic Law and Culture*, p. 72.

¹¹⁷ Green, Nile. “Journeyman, Middlemen: Travel, Trans-Culture and Technology in the Origins of Muslim Printing.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies*. 2009, Vol. 41, 2, pp. 203-224.

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